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## Welcome to the Village—Developing transformative literacy through embodiment

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Relating Systems Thinking and Design  
2022 Symposium  
University of Brighton, Brighton, UK,  
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## **Welcome to the Village – Developing transformative literacy through embodiment**

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Acquiring transformative literacy skills is a complex challenge, it requires an understanding of the world's complex interconnectedness and relational co-construction in which human agency acknowledges its co-evolutionary pathways with each other and the Earth. It requires an understanding of present and future systems, and of the processes required to bring about transformations in those systems (Künkel & Ragnarsdottir, 2022).

Forrester's word to describe complex systems was "counterintuitive" (Forrester, 1971), and indeed looking at policy making arena's patterns, it seems that not only comprehending interconnectedness is counterintuitive to most decision-makers, but the system of decision-making is at large counter transformative. Acknowledging the counterintuitive character of complexity and interconnectedness brings about an epistemological question about how we know and alternative ways of knowing.

Forrester assumed that complexity is counter to common sense, the rational mind, and the cognitive function of our brains. Luckily, we are not brains, nor minds- we are humans, carrying our brains at the top part of our body – a complex living system inside a complex social system. Grasping complexity requires us to counter our mind's intuition, and to connect to other intuitions that are more fertile for the grasping of and designing in a complex-social system arena.

To tackle this counterintuitive challenge of transformative literacy, we have an accessible, safe, free-of-charge tool: our human body, a complex system through which we can practice interconnectedness individually and collectively.

KEYWORDS: Transformative-literacy, system-awareness, embodiment, improvisation, system-sensing, complexity.

RSD TOPIC: Health and well-being, Radical shifts of planetary health, different stories in design

## **Description**

### **System awareness before system thinking**

What if our starting point for learning about complex systems would be our bodies? we can practice system awareness before trying system thinking, and so, without understanding it fully, just by experiencing the system we are, and the system we are part of, we can sense system patterns, we can feel interdependence, we can inquire about system change by enacting it (Hayashi, 2021; Irwin & Baxter, 2008). Those deep understanding are crucial for transformation literacy and very difficult to attain using only our minds, due to the consistency of our blind spots (Scharmer, 2003). Working with our body as a learning tool can be awkward for those who aren't accustomed, but embracing this awkwardness is a major step towards the realization of eco-social systems.

### **Our village\* workshop**

This workshop intends to offer an alternative way to the exploration of complexity and systemic transformation through an embodied experience. The approach in this workshop is to use methods inspired by dance, contact improvisation, and improv theater, to create space for an embodied experience of complex systems, rather than intellectualizing them. Through several individual and group embodied exercises, reflection, and discussion that follows, the participants will sense, probe, and debate

various concepts of transformative system literacy as complexity, interconnectedness, relational co-construction, and human agency.

Our village workshop corresponds with two of the symposium's focus topics: It offers a playful exploration of the awareness needed for designing radical shifts in and for planetary health, and it illustrates through embodiment Bateson's notion of "Aphanipoiesis", as we improvise and investigate our hypothesis as one context or system senses another, leaning on Bateson's aphanipoiesis that "offers permission to take seriously the significant change taking place in ways that are unreachable by analysis and direct action" (Bateson, 2021), the workshop offers a reflection on the multiple layers of system change our body can manifest.

*\* The name of the workshop is referring to an exercise developed by Arawana Hayashi in her work "Social precensing theater".*

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## **Workshop format**

120 minutes | in-person | maximum number of participants 24 |

### **Agenda**

- Check-in (15 minutes)
- Introducing the idea of complex system awareness through embodiment (10 minutes)
- Our body: duet exploration (10 minutes)
- Our social body: an exercise in small groups of five (30 minutes)
- The Village: exercise with the whole group (30 minutes)
- Check out (25 minutes)

### **Setting and general notice**

This workshop requires proximity and physical interaction, so participants need to be willing to move around and interact with others. The workshop is intended to be inclusive for everyone, it is kept appropriate in terms of physical contact and doesn't require special physical abilities. however, if you have certain movement limitations, it will be good to know in advance so I and the group can adapt it accordingly if needed.

Technically, the workshop requires a large enough flat space approximately 2 sq meters per participant.

## **References**

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